A MARSHALL CAVENDISH PUBLICATION 30 IN FORTNIGHTLY PARTS

The Ancestral Trail

CYBER-CHALLENGE IN THE NEXT DIMENSION

30 Mortex,

Molten Trail-Blazer

White hot terror in the tunnels of doom

Julek Heller

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Ashen-faced, Richard desperately tried to manoeuvre the cyber cruiser away from the glowing spheres of light. It was no use. No matter which direction he steered the flying machine it was impossible to shake off his lightning-fast pursuers. Richard turned to Robo for help but his heart sank when he realized that his companion was still totally immobile. It was as if the robot had gone into hibernation. Then he had a sudden brainwave.

COLD COMFORT

Richard remembered how Robo had attempted to add his power to the cyber cruiser by plugging into a socket on its chassis. Reaching behind him, he grasped the robot's arm and quickly inserted the end of it into the same socket.

There was a shower of dense, white steam which almost knocked Richard from his seat. Sparks flew and circuits hissed as Robo sprang into life. The jet of steam intensified and Richard shivered as he realized that it was icy cold. A film of white frost formed on his armour. It was then that Richard noticed that the strange balls of light had gone.

Richard turned to face Robo as his companion gave what can only be described as the robotic equivalent of a cough. "Power partially restored," the robot said, his voice still noticeably weak. "Pekods repelled with perma-beam."

"Pekods?" Richard said. "Perma-beam?"

Robo swivelled his domed head towards Richard. "Pekods are spherical sensory organs of more powerful evil. Perma-beam is sub-zero power ray. Perma-beam used to lower Chosen One's ambient temperature. Pekods attracted only to heat."

Richard cupped his hands and blew on his frozen fingers. "Are you saying that you made me colder so that the balls of light could not sense me any more?"

"Affirmative," Robo replied.

"Well I hope that's the last we see of the pekods!" Richard said. "I don't think I can take another blast of your ice beam!"

Plastic desert

As the pair travelled on, the weird mirror terrain gradually changed. The shards of broken glass were replaced by a deep red desert, immersed in bright sunshine.

The powdery terrain was filled with strange shapes and patterns, which the cyber winds had etched into the sands. Richard decreased the cyber cruiser's altitude in order to a get a closer look at the breathtaking scene. He was surprised to see that the crimson sands appeared to be made from shiny, glinting plastic.

A beeping noise from behind Richard

caught his attention. He turned to see that a new message had appeared on Robo's binary panel. Richard grimaced. He knew that something unpleasant usually happened when this occurred.

"Robo, where do your messages come from?" he asked.

His companion hesitated for a moment before replying. "Unable to answer question," came the eventual response. "Memory banks damaged in acid attack."

"If your memory banks are damaged, how do you know the way to the Cyber Dimension exit?" Richard asked.

"Unable to answer question..."

"...Memory banks damaged in acid attack," Richard interrupted. "This is getting us nowhere!"

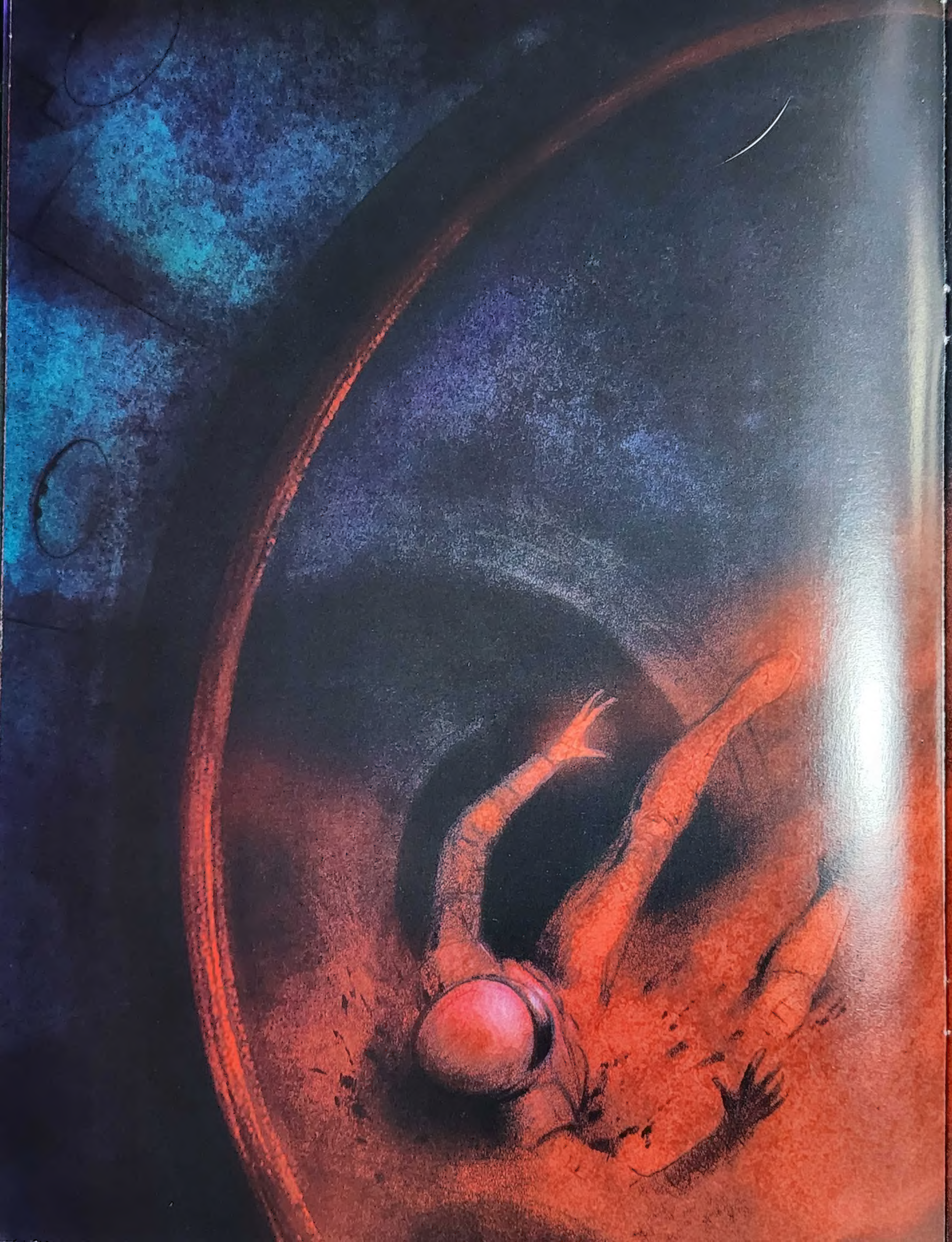
It was then that Richard spotted something on the ground. Nervously, he wondered what new danger awaited him.

Into the Catacombs

Richard heaved an enormous sigh of relief. The object he had spotted was nothing more than a small hole in the plastic desert. He had no idea what its purpose might be.

His relief was short-lived. There was a whooshing noise and Richard felt himself being dragged from the flying machine. A strange, powerful force emanating from the hole had caught Richard in its grasp.

Richard reached over and tried to grab hold of Robo but it was too late. He tumbled helplessly through the air.



Richard could see the cyber cruiser speed into the distance as he was sucked into the hole. The squat figure of Robo, perched on top, grew smaller and smaller. Richard called in vain for help.

Suddenly it was dark. The red, plastic desert vanished from view. In its place was a dense blackness which seemed to stick to his body like treacle.

Alone in the darkness

Downwards Richard fell until the desert sky became a tiny pin-prick of light. As he fell, Richard could make out strange looking luminous objects that seemed to be floating in the darkness. Once, he tried to reach out and touch one of them, but was forced to pull his hand away when the object let out a snarl to reveal savage, razor sharp teeth.

With a thud, Richard's journey was suddenly over. He had landed on a pile of plastic sand, which cushioned his fall. He was in a tunnel of some sort. Its walls were lined with dull, metallic ribs. They were caked with greasy, green slime.

Richard could hear a faint noise coming from somewhere far away that reminded him of tribal drumming. Yet there was a mechanical quality about the rhythmic tones.

Looking around him, Richard spied a small tunnel. Closer inspection revealed a faint red light emanating from within. He followed the light.

The tunnel seemed to last forever but eventually, he emerged from the darkness to find himself in a cavern that was lit up with a brilliant fluorescent red glow.

There was something strangely familiar about the place. Richard realized what it was. It was the same smell that had been all around him when he was being chased by the pekods. As if to confirm Richard's suspicions, the cavern was suddenly filled with balls of light. The pekods had returned.

Richard backed away but it was useless. Everywhere he looked he could see brightly-coloured spheres. Like bees around a honey pot, the pekods swarmed over him.

Richard felt intense heat and struggled to pull away from his captors. Yet despite his panic he noticed something strange. Whenever the pekods touched his body armour, their colour changed. The blinding light that dazzled his senses gave way to a cold, monotone blue.

THE TRAIL-BLAZER

Richard felt himself being pushed into another tunnel. His feet were lifted off the ground and realized that for some reason the pekods did not want to hurt him.

As he sped through the tunnel, Richard decided that any chance of escaping the grip of the strange creatures was impossible. He would just have to wait and see where they were taking him.

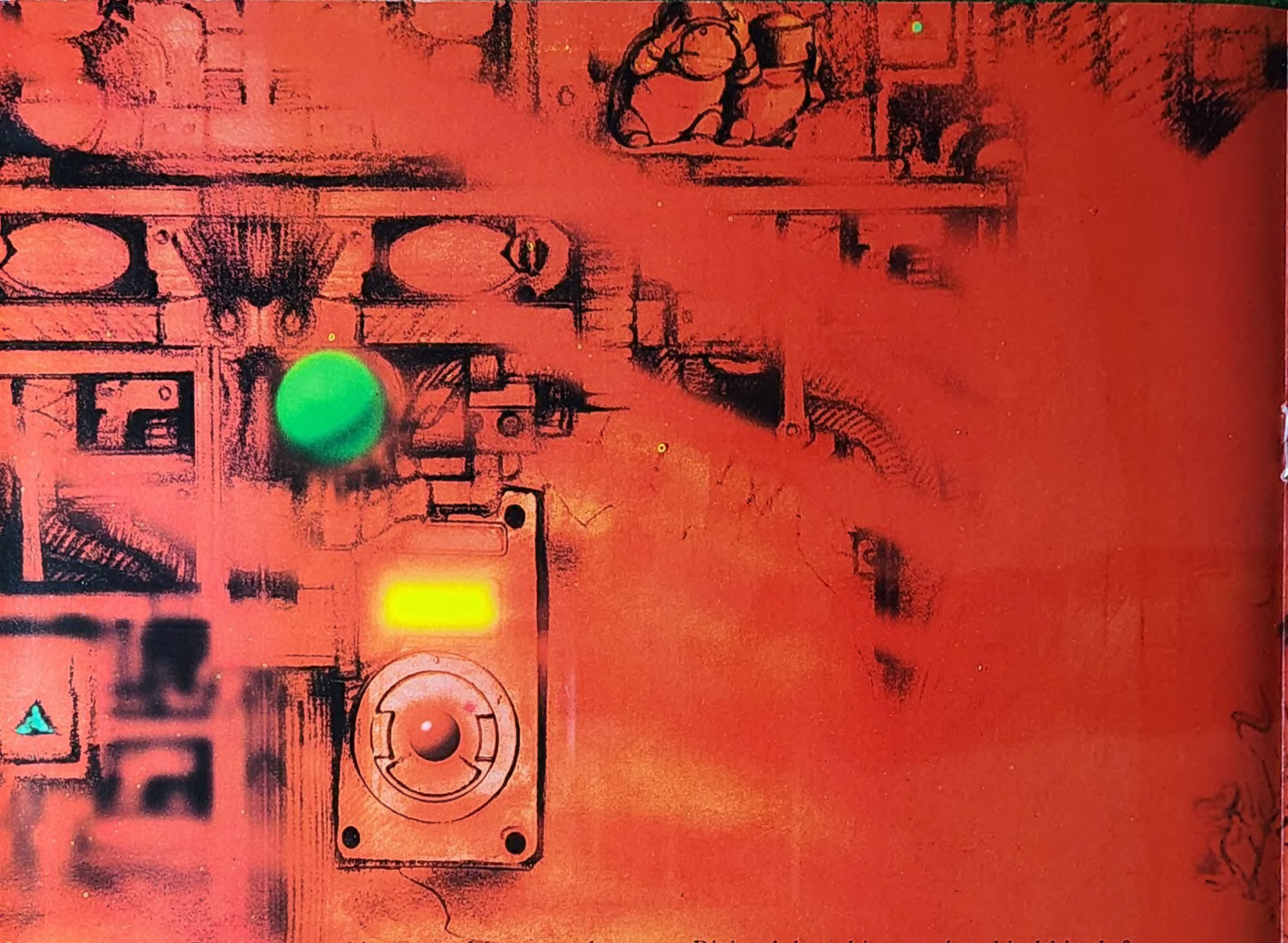
He did not have to wait long. Soon he found himself in another cavern. There, he saw the source of the mechanical noise that he had noticed earlier. Lining the walls of his underground prison were switches, pipes and machinery of all shapes, colours and sizes.

Richard felt himself being released by the pekods. He turned towards them and was surprised to see the glowing spheres speed off into another tunnel. Once again, he was alone. Richard shivered.

Above the din of the machinery, Richard became aware of another sound. The hairs on the back of his neck stood on end as he realized it was footsteps. Whatever the footsteps belonged to had to be enormous.

Suddenly, the cavern was filled with a fierce, red glow. At the centre of this light stood the most frightening creature that Richard had ever seen.

"Who dares enter the citadel of Mortex?" proclaimed a thunderous voice.



Richard stared in awe at Mortex and shielded his face from the intense heat emanating from the creature. It was gigantic in size and almost filled the whole of the cavern.

The giant apparition appeared to be made from molten metal. Mortex's features were in continual motion, swirling and reforming so that Richard could never be sure if it had a face or not. Its body, too, rippled in a slippery, fluid fashion. When it moved it gave the impression of flowing rather than walking. Instead of hands, it had two immense, metallic pincers.

A DEADLY GAME

Towering over him, the vile being sent a shiver down Richard's spine. Mortex's eyes scrutinized its prey.

"Well, well. What a prize!" mocked Mortex. "Unless I'm mistaken my minions have brought me the Chosen One."

Richard drew his sword and held it aloft. He was not giving up without a fight.

The boom of Mortex's laughter echoed around the cavern. "So, the Chosen One wants to play!"

Richard gasped as Mortex launched a ball of fire towards him. Falling to the ground he narrowly avoided it. He watched as it exploded in a shower of molten metal and white hot sparks.

"Well done, Chosen One," Mortex gloated. Two more balls of fire were fired at the boy.

Richard rolled to his right and once more evaded the deadly fireballs.

"Bravo!" Mortex chuckled and moved towards Richard. "Oh well. All good things must come to an end."

Richard's mind raced. He remembered the binary message, but could not think how it would help him this time.

"Robo!" he called. "Where are you?"

"Your little tin friend is no use to you now," scowled the molten creature.

Sweat poured down Richard's face as the giant Mortex towered over him.

In the grip of Mortex

A beam of white light shot out from between Mortex's eyes and Richard was lifted into the air.

"You like to play games, do you?" said the taunting voice of Mortex as Richard kicked and struggled.

"The Evil One will be pleased to see you. What fun he will have." Mortex released Richard and he fell to the floor.

In desperation, Richard threw his sword at his tormentor. It struck Mortex with a crash and dropped harmlessly to the ground.

"Good shot, Chosen One," laughed Mortex. "I do like the thrill of competition."

The creature had underestimated its victim. While Mortex was briefly distracted, Richard climbed to his feet. Scooping up his sword, he dodged passed the molten monster and rushed to the nearest tunnel.

As he ran, Richard could hear the sound of Mortex's laughter reverberating through the underground catacombs.

"Here I come! Ha ha ha!" The echo of Mortex's booming voice mixed with Richard's frantic footsteps as he fled blindly through the tunnel. "Chosen One, come and play!"

Mortex was toying with Richard.

Suddenly, the tunnel came to an end. Richard found himself in some kind of control room. It was filled with blinking lights and multi-coloured switches.

Richard hurriedly surveyed the control panels and circuit boards before him. He had no idea what they were for. Haphazardly, he began pressing buttons and flicking switches. He could hear Mortex approaching.

His pursuer's manic laughter came to a sudden halt.

"No! No! You must not enter my control room!" Richard could sense panic in Mortex's voice.

"Don't touch anything – it's against the rules." The creature's arrogance had suddenly vanished. It was almost as if it were pleading for its life.

A MOLTEN END

Mortex entered the room, his face a burning mask of rage. At the same time, Richard continued randomly pushing control buttons in the vain hope that he could find a way out of the room.

"No! Not that one!" Mortex shrieked.

It was too late. With a crash, the roof of the room opened up and Richard could once more see daylight. In an instant, the room was filled with red, plastic sand. Mortex caught the full brunt of the shiny particles. His cry of despair dwindled away to nothing as he was completely covered with sand.

There was a tremendous hissing sound as the plastic sand melted and adhered to Mortex's fiery body. Richard watched in amazement as the particles formed a sticky coating which moulded to the struggling Mortex.

Screams of rage turned into cries of fear as Mortex tried to break free of the plastic coating. Richard was almost up to his neck in sand when he noticed a metallic cord

appear from above.

It was Robo. Richard's robotic companion was hovering above in the desert sunshine. He was busy lowering a harness towards Richard.

Hoisted to safety

Richard grasped the harness and felt himself being pulled from the pile of plastic sand. "Robo," he said, a broad grin spreading over his face. "Am I pleased to see you!"

As Richard was pulled to safety he glanced down at the smouldering carcass that was once Mortex. The creature's useless struggles had now ceased. Richard recalled the binary message. "Of course," he mused. "Mortex cannot survive without oxygen to keep his fires burning. the plastic sand has cut off his supply."

The bright sunshine lit up Richard's body armour as the grisly scene below him gradually diminished in size.

"Chosen One has done well," Robo said, suddenly interrupting Richard's thoughts.

Suddenly, from beneath them there was an enormous bang. It sounded to Richard like a clash of thunder. It was followed by a bright jet of flame which hurtled up into the air after them.

"Mortex underground citadel disintegrating," Robo diagnosed. "Must locate cyber cruiser."

RACE AGAINST TIME

Richard held on to the harness with all his might as Robo increased his speed. The acrid smell of burning plastic filled the air and pools of evil, black smoke blotted out the sky.

"You must go faster," called Richard. "The flames are gaining on us!"

Then there was another, louder, explosion. Shards of burning plastic flew into the sky. Richard felt his grip on the harness loosen.

SHOOMI'S SANCTUARY

Enter into the Cyber Dimension and engage optical recognition to find...

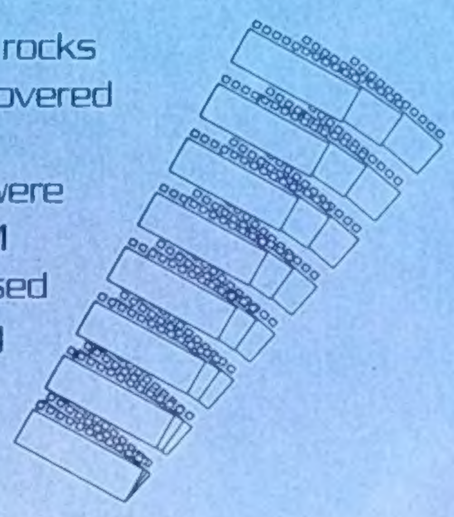
▶ Shoomi and Shoobi

Richard and Robo's twin followers are at it again. Hidden away somewhere in this issue are Shoomi and Shoobi. Can you use your powers of observation to find them?

In issue 28 Shoomi and Shoobi were on page 449.

▶ Computer Challenge

Another vitally important computer component from the sinister *Cyber Dimension* has been hidden in this issue. Help Richard and Robo locate it in less than three minutes.
When you have discovered the component's hiding place, can you guess what it is and what its function might be?



In last week's issue, the rocks that Robo and Richard hovered above when fleeing the Hermisite on page 449 were made of computer VRAM chips. VRAM chips are used by computers for storing information that is displayed on a computer monitor. VRAM chips also enable computer monitors to display different colours. A standard home computer usually has the capacity to display 256 different colours on its monitor

▶ Computer View Panel

Since Richard was transported into the sinister Cyber Dimension, this mysterious panel has appeared twice in every issue. Later on in the story you will learn of its strange function, but if you carefully study the computer view panels you will gain a valuable insight into the true purpose of the Richard's quest.

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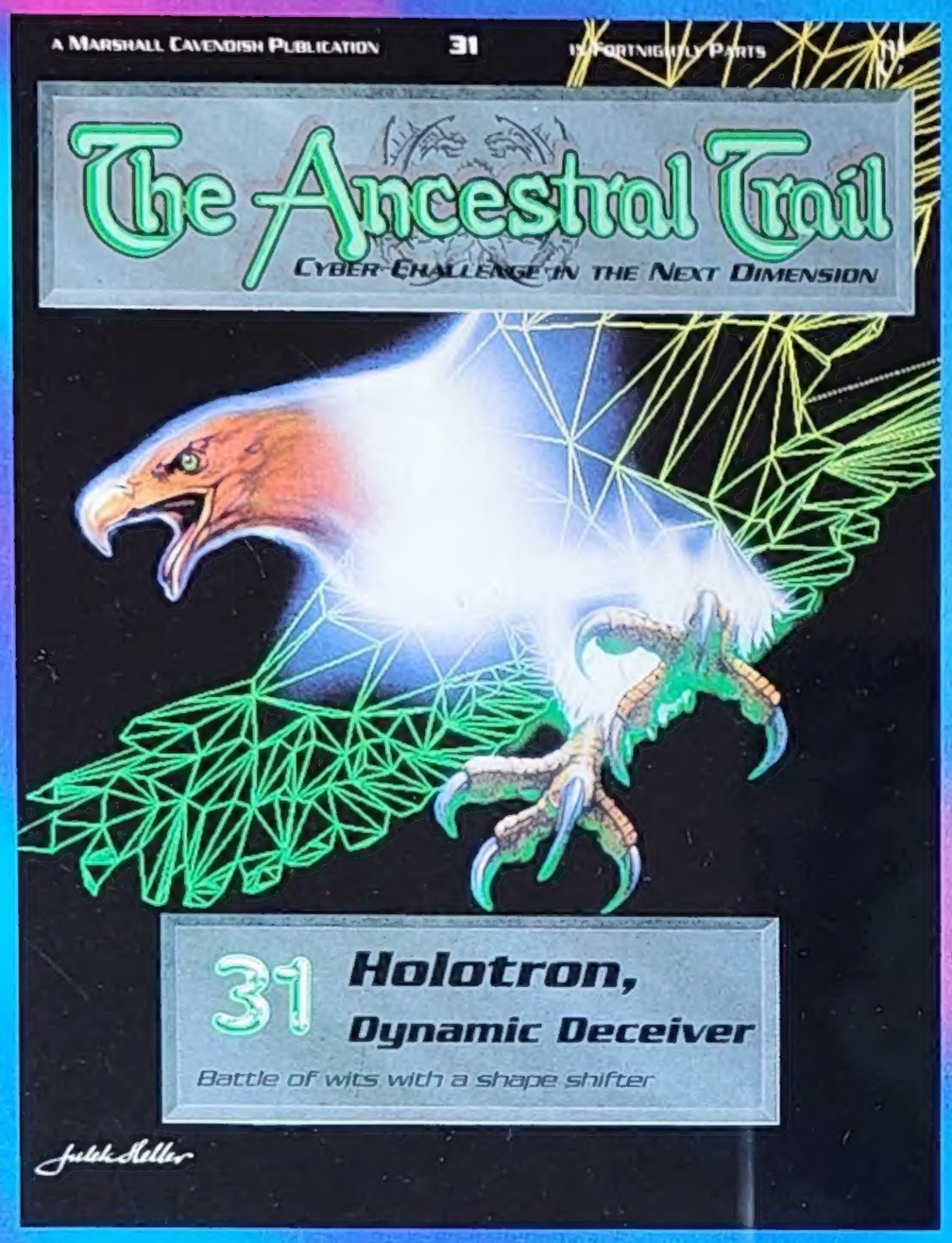

In Issue 31

Holitron,
Dynamic Deceiver

Richard loses Robo and enters a land where nothing is real. Can he find a way to escape the clutches of the incredible shape shifter?

plus

- ▶ More **Techscan** cards for you to cut out and collect.
- ▶ 2 more **Cyber Power** cards to add to your collection.
- ▶ More playing pieces for the **Mainframe Control** game.

Coming in Issue 32

Husasan, Silicon Samurai

An ancient warrior in modern guise is guardian to an evil force. To continue his quest, Richard must do battle with this vile swordsman.

plus

Playing boards for the **Mainframe Control** and **Cyber Chess** strategy games

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